Turmeric Anthotype Photography: Instructional Guide

HISTORY

The alternative process photography style known as “Turmeric Anthotype” was discovered in 1839 by Sir John Herschel. Herschel experimented with various photosensitive pigments derived from plants. This specific process utilizes the rich pigments found in the common household spice, turmeric. The turmeric anthotype is also known as a “Contact Print.” This style of printing is formed by laying an object or film negative on top of your paper coated in a light sensitive turmeric solution.

MATERIALS

Time: 20 minutes (preparation), 2 to 3 hours (exposure).

→ **Total**: Approximately 3 hours 20 minutes.

Solution Ingredients	Amount
Turmeric powder	1 tablespoon
Borax	2 teaspoons
91% Isopropyl alcohol	¼ cup (50 milliliters)
Water	½ cup (118 milliliters)

TOOLS:

- 2 jars or containers to mix your solution in
- Spoon
- Kraft or mixed media paper
- Any solid sun blocking object (like leaves, flowers, or die-cut shapes)
- Sponge or paint brush
- Gloves
- Apron and/or old clothes
- Cardboard sheet to protect work surface
- Measuring tablespoon and teaspoon
- Measuring cup
- Any sheet of transparent glass
- Baking tray that will fit your paper
- The sun

INSTRUCTIONS

Prepping Your Station:

The best time to start this poject is when the sun is high in the sky.

Because of the photosensitivity of turmeric, we will be working in a dim space indoors for the first portion of this project.

First, cover your work surface with a sheet of cardboard. Next, be sure to wear gloves and an apron or old clothes to protect yourself and your environment from turmeric stains.

Mixing the Turmeric Solution:

Start by adding one tablespoon of turmeric powder and ¼ cup (50 mL) of alcohol into your first mixing container, then stir well. You should be left with a vibrant yellow liquid with the same consistency of the alcohol you started with.

Prepping Your Paper for Application:

With your sponge or paint brush, apply one thin layer of the turmeric solution onto your choice of paper. Avoid puddles and over saturation as these conditions could compromise the integrity of your paper and lead to tears.

After coating your paper, allow the solution to dry completely in a dark place such as a cabinet or drawer. This should take roughly 15 minutes, but depending on local humidity and altitude, may take a bit longer. After drying, lightly brush off any remaining turmeric powder with your hand.

Planning Your Design Ahead of Time:

While your paper dries, collect your object(s) and decide how you would like your design to look. For my anthotype I will be using a variety of leaves, flowers, and other natural materials. This step saves us precious development time needed once we move outside.

Developing the Anthotype:

Once your coated paper is fully dry, place it back onto your cardboard surface. Next, referencing your previously created design, lie your objects on your dry coated paper. Then, cover your paper and design entirely with any sheet of transparent glass (this could be the inside of a picture frame, a Pyrex baking dish, or an old windowpane).

Once you're satisfied with your design; for best results, carefully bring the paper and design, sandwiched between the cardboard and glass outside into direct sunlight, but a window that gets direct sunlight can also work. Finally, leave the anthotype to develop for 2 to 3 hours.

Preserving the Image:

About 10 minutes before you're ready to bring your anthotype inside;

In a clean measuring cup, add two teaspoons of Borax to ½ cup (118ml) of warm tap water and stir until completely dissolved. Next, place your anthotype in your baking tray. Then, pour your water and Borax mixture onto the anthotype, this should turn the yellow colors of your image a dark brown. When the image stops changing color, rinse it thoroughly and gently under the kitchen tap to remove any excess Borax. Finally, allow your anthotype to dry completely before displaying.